

30 Best practice

Marketing

Finding new routes to new customers

NANCY TRAVERSY, CEO and co-founder of Barefoot Books, is bucking the trend in the publishing industry. The company, which publishes quality children's books saw a 40 per cent increase in group turnover in 2004 and sales so far for 2005 are up by the same level again. All this at a time when most other publishing companies' sales are either flat or down. What began as a small, home-based UK business in 1993 has grown into an international company with 20 staff in the US and 12 in the UK.

Having previously worked at PricewaterhouseCoopers, Traversy admits she knew nothing about the rules of publishing, so she made them up. "Publishing is very hard and very archaic," she says. "You know the customers are out there, but how do you get to them? You have to be different and think outside the box."

Barefoot's success has been due in part to a steadfast commitment to its core values and mission, to create beautifully illustrated books with quality content. "There were either well illustrated books with little substance, or informative books that weren't beautiful," says Traversy. "We saw a gap in the market for books combining great design with

great content that would introduce children to the values and traditions of different cultures around the globe."

These values have struck a chord with many parents. Traversy moved her family to Boston to spearhead US growth just before September 11.

"People's values changed then," she says. "They developed more appreciation of other cultures and became more concerned about how their kids were going to be raised."

Another element in Traversy's own interpretation of the rules of publishing has been to open new distribution channels, including mail order, e-commerce and a very successful direct-selling scheme, the Barefoot Stallholder Programme. "The programme empowers people to work for themselves and they love what we stand for," says Traversy. "They hold parties at home, or stalls at schools and country fairs—the viral nature of the home selling programme has been very successful."

Barefoot Books has also begun partnering with other companies with similar value in order to



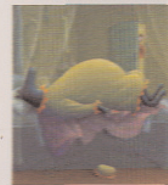
provide a broader offering. For example, Folkmanis Puppets, whose puppets are inspired by nature and literature, makes characters to match some of Barefoot's titles. "People can buy a book and the puppet that goes with it to make a complete present," explains Traversy.

Another strategy involves celebrity endorsement.

Paul McCartney endorses the recently published *Herb The Vegetarian Dragon* which is all about living together in peace and harmony. Traversy says: "This has been great timing as he [McCartney] is everywhere at the moment."

The lack of cultural differences in Barefoot products allows for more streamlined marketing, as Traversy explains: "The bestsellers are the same in the UK and the US," she says. "And we have to market in the same way to survive in a tough industry. So the next challenge as an international business is for the US and UK teams to work together. We need to avoid an 'us and them' situation."

Sarah Hanson



Well tread: "We have to market in the same way to survive in a tough industry," says Barefoot co-founder Nancy Traversy

